

The benefits of a little resistance for older adults

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University of Queensland research is showing the benefits of resistance training in keeping older Australians in tip top form.

Dr Tim Henwood, a postdoctoral research fellow with UQ and Blue Care, said his recently completed PhD research investigated how people over the age of 65 responded to resistance training.

"What we were looking at was how simple resistance training can improve muscle strength, power and functional performance." Dr Henwood said.

"By building strength we are aiming to improve the quality of life of older people and allow them to maintain independence into later life.

"This type of training not only has significant physical benefits but has also been associated with a decreased risk of later life disease."

Dr Henwood said the study had participants do a basic twice-weekly, machine-based resistance training program that targeted the major muscles of the upper and lower body. All training sessions were thoroughly supervised to promote motivation and correct technique.

He said with Australia's ageing population there would be greater stress placed on our healthcare system and any preventative measures taken would have long-term positive effects.

He said while many older people are encouraged to do basic aerobic exercise like walking to maintain their health, the benefits of increasing their muscle strength and power are as if not more important in the prevention of functional decline.

"We saw some very significant increases, up to a 50 percent in muscle strength and power," he said.

"However, the really important increases were those we saw in the participant's functional ability.

"For this age group these increases are what allows them to keep successfully climbing stairs and getting out of chairs, thereby allowing them to retain their independence."

He said the results of the research were so successful they were adopted into the popular UQ Sport's AgeFIT program, which aims to promote the physical well-being of older adult through resistance exercise.

Source: Research Australia

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